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ABSTRACT

English has by tradition been the major and official language used in Australia. Dependence upon Southern British norms of correctness has only gradually been eroded, and the establishment of Australian norms to replace them has been equally gradual. Agencies of language standardization do function in Australia and formulate on an ongoing basis standards of usage, for technical terms, place names, and for the selection of varieties in officially sanctioned situations. The provision of extended models of usage is undertaken by the mass media, broadcasters, in particular, and, less formally, the press. Recent changes in the composition and distribution of population and the introduction of new varieties with significant numbers of speakers are resulting in new social and linguistic situations which are exerting pressures on the traditional patterns of language treatment and are forcing new developments in them. The most significant recent changes in policy have been in broadcasting, where relaxation of restrictive legislation now permits programs in ethnic languages on special stations or access radio, and in education, where ethnic languages have entered the curricula of both primary and secondary schools and are available to matriculation. A bilingual education program for speakers of Australian Aboriginal languages is also being implemented. (Author/CLK)

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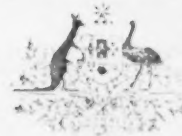
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Issues for Language Treatment in Australia



English in Australia

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The Development of Australian English

The development of English in Australia has produced remarkably little regional variation in what has been, historically, a widely scattered population. Ramson (1972) considers the homogeneity of General Australian English to be perhaps its most distinctive feature. Gunn (1972a), however, suggests that the extent of regional homogeneity in Australian English has been assumed rather than investigated and points to a growing appreciation of regional and social differences in usage. (cf. Bernard 1969)

Southern British English was early perceived as providing a norm of correctness for speakers of English in Australia. Gunn (1972b) suggests that a second variety of Australian English — Cultivated Australian — developed later than General Australian as a result of attempts to speak Standard (Southern British) English. Dependence on the norms of Southern British English has persisted and is still to some extent current. However, the development of Australian English has resulted in a gradual divergence from these norms and in the establishment of Australian replacements for them, although the degree of difference between the two standards is not great. Australia has developed a number of its own agencies for the standardisation of language, and is slowly acquiring a body of literature codifying the norms produced by these agencies.

The Standardisation of Australian English

The most formal processes of standardisation are those relating to technical terminology and place-names. The standardisation of technical terminology is carried out by the Standards Association of Australia, the Australian member body of the International Organisation for Standardisation and the International Electro-technical Commission. Terminology to be standardised arises from the compilation of commercial

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¹ An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title "Agencies of Language Standardisation in Australia" in *Civile* (1976).

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and industrial standards. The SAA acts to standardise existing terminology — rather than introducing new terms — through a process of selection, rigorous definition and construction of glossaries which are disseminated to the relevant industry or commercial domain.

The decision to adopt metric currency and weights and measures has produced highly conspicuous terminological standardisation in Australia. The Metric Conversion Board produced and disseminated glossaries and guides to the pronunciation of the new units, using a very wide range of channels of implementation — pamphlets, the daily press, notices in shops and advertisements on radio and television. Aside from the obvious problems associated with ensuring familiarity with new units and terms, the Board introduced the pronunciation 'kilometer' in preference to *kil'ometer*, which had a degree of currency in the community before metrication. 'kilometer' has prevailed, but not without a struggle. The Board went so far as to adopt an overtly authoritarian stance in a widely publicised debate with a former prime minister over this pronunciation.

The standardisation of place names in Australia is carried out by independently constituted place names committees in the various states; these maintain contact through the National Mapping Division, which acts as the national names authority. The place names committees assign names to topographical features, townships and post offices and standardise the form and spelling of new and existing names. Decisions are gazetted, published and disseminated to interested parties and the public. An example is the postcode book, produced in conjunction with Australia Post, which gives the official name (and postal code) of every recognised postal area in the country.

The provision of extended models of usage is undertaken by the mass media — broadcasters in particular and less formally by the press. Program standards for commercial radio and television operators were established and maintained by the Australian Broadcasting Control Board until the end of 1976, when the Board ceased to exist. Control is currently held by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal which is conducting an enquiry into questions of self-regulation. The previous standard, which required the use of correct English and the avoidance of slang and bad grammar in broadcasting — without elaborating these requirements — is still in force. Decisions on future standards are still before the Tribunal.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), the national radio and television network, is highly aware of the need to provide a model of usage for the very wide public it commands. It has established a Standing Committee on Spoken English which codifies and implements standards of pronunciation and usage within the organisation. The Standing Committee attempts to provide an Australian standard of correctness for both usage and pronunciation, a standard which it recognises to be different in many respects from the Southern British standard.

Daily newspapers also serve a wide public, and there is a (variable) degree of awareness of the pos-

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sibilities of providing models of usage amongst editorial staff. One newspaper, at least, has taken the question of correctness in written language sufficiently seriously to publish a dictionary and style guide (Age Publications 1969, *The Australian National Quick Reference Dictionary and Encyclopedia*) for sale to the public, incorporating material from its editorial style guide.

Other agencies which may possibly be involved in the standardisation of English are far less directed in their activities, and the significance of their impact is far more restricted. The education system, for example, is structured in such a way as to make nationwide standardisation of usage virtually impossible. This is in strong contrast to cases of nations employing a policy approach to language treatment, where the education system provides one of the chief agencies for the dissemination of the standard language. However, the constitution of a National Council for English Teachers (NCET) subsequent to the Australian Unesco Seminar on the teaching of English in 1972 has entailed work towards parity of English curricula in the various states.

There are very few reference works dealing with Australian English usage and directed to an audience other than schoolchildren. Of those that do exist, by far the most authoritative is the *Style Manual for Authors and Printers of Australian Government Publications* (Erwin, D. et al. 1972) which sets out official recommendations on many aspects of writing, editing and printing of Government publications and which is also directed to the public as a guide to the correct usage of Australian English. Much of the text remains technical, directed to the needs of printers, but it does offer specific guidance on spelling, abbreviation, the use of punctuation and italics, a discussion on style and some direction on grammar.

Dictionaries of current Australian English, in the sense of new compilations, do not exist. There have been a number of dictionaries adapted to Australian conditions produced in the last few years, the most recent of which is the *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* (Johnston, G., ed. 1976). This dictionary incorporates an estimated 10% of specifically Australian vocabulary, as well as a much larger proportion of general words with definitions revised in the direction of Australian usage. Pressure to revise came from Australian users of the previous edition. This gives force to the growing level of community awareness of Australian English as one facet of a distinctive culture. And this in turn may well serve to affect future decisions of the agencies of standardisation.

Sanctioning of Non-English Codes

The historical pattern of population distribution in Australia has yielded in the last three decades to one which differs radically in two major dimensions. The vast majority of Australians are now clustered in the coastal cities: Australia has become one of the most urbanised countries in the world. Secondly, approximately one quarter of the total population of Australia consists of immigrants who have entered the country since 1945. These immigrants have introduced a number of other regional varieties of English, as well as other

European and non-European languages. These two factors of urbanisation and massive immigration are producing profound alterations in the traditional Australian distribution of language varieties. Linguistic and social pressures have emerged which are affecting the established patterns of language and language treatment.

One of the consequences of the historical language situation in Australia has been that English has been the only thinkable candidate for use in officially sanctioned language situations. It is only very recently that it has become possible to talk meaningfully of the formal selection of a language code for use in particular situations in Australia. Changing attitudes in the 1970s have led both to growing official, academic and community awareness of the problems of migrant communication (Neustupny 1975) and to pressure towards a pluralistic approach to offset the injustices associated with monolingualism and other aspects of forced assimilation (Clyne 1976 and this issue).

The most significant recent changes in policy have been in broadcasting, where relaxation of restrictive legislation now permits programs in ethnic languages on special stations or access radio; and in education, where ethnic languages have entered the curricula of both primary and secondary schools, and are available to matriculation, at least in Victoria (Department of Education 1976a; Clyne 1976); and where the provision of a bilingual education program for speakers of Australian Aboriginal languages in the Northern Territory is at present being implemented (Kaldor 1976; Tryon 1976; and Sandefur, this issue).

Teaching English to Migrants

However, these first steps towards the breakdown of official monolingualism in Australia should be seen in the perspective of other attempts to standardise varieties. The provision of Government-sponsored English language programs for adult immigrants dates from 1946. Figures available for 1975 indicate a fairly massive program of federally-funded, state-administered courses for adult immigrants, including 'intensive' courses of eight weeks' duration, part-time and full-time 'accelerated' courses ranging from ten to twenty-four weeks' in duration, classes for family groups, industrial workers, a Home Tutor scheme for women, and advanced classes. Furthermore, state operated Migrant Education Centers function in state capitals, and Education Centers have been established in migrant hostels in New South Wales and Victoria (Department of Education 1976b; Kaldor 1976). The extent to which this activity can be regarded as a serious attempt at the promotion of a monolingual norm for Australia must be judged in the light of the findings of the 1973 Immigration Survey (Australian Population and Immigration Council 1976). 35% of those surveyed who were born in non-English speaking countries were assessed as having fluent to good English. Of the majority who had not progressed in English, more than half had not attended English classes.

Summary

English has by tradition been the major and official language used in Australia. Dependence upon Southern British norms of correctness has only

gradually been eroded, and the establishment of Australian norms to replace them has been equally gradual. Agencies of language standardisation do function in Australia and formulate on an ongoing basis standards of usage, for technical terms and for the selection of varieties in officially sanctioned situations. Recent changes in the composition and distribution of population and the introduction of new varieties with significant numbers of speakers are resulting in new social and linguistic situations which are exerting pressures on the traditional patterns of language treatment and are forcing new developments in them.

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